

# Books of The Times

## Entrances and Exits

By THOMAS LASK

**THE PHILBY CONSPIRACY.** By Bruce Page, David Leitch and Philip Knightly. 300 pages. Illustrated. Doubleday. \$5.95.

**MY SILENT WAR.** By Kim Philby. 262 pages. Grove \$5.95.

FROM the late twenties through the forties, one of the more popular genres in book publishing was the confessions of those who had become Communists, saw the light and defected, and quickly hastened to tell the world how they had been duped. From Benjamin Gitlow to Howard Fast, they poured out their souls, telling how their god had failed them, and asking why others were still so obtuse as to continue in their blind ways.

Perhaps the best of these books was Whittaker Chambers's "Witness"—best in the grace and limpidity of its writing, in its conveying of the atmosphere of Communist activity from the inside, and in the search of Chambers's lumbering spirit for a transcendental experience in the dross of conspiracy, hack politics and menial jobs.

The two books at the head of the column are striking in that they deal with three who stayed. As is well known by now they were three upper-class, Cambridge University bred, English clubmen, who worked in high and sensitive places in the British Government and transmitted information back to the Russians. Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean did it from some time in the thirties until their escape to the Soviet Union in 1951. Kim Philby was a Soviet agent for 30 years, until he showed up in the Soviet Union—he called it "home"—in 1963. It comes as a slight jolt to read Philby's contemptuous reference in his book, "My Silent War" to those defectors from Communism who chose "the political position of querulous outcast" or to hear Burgess in "The Philby Conspiracy" defend Stalin's paranoid ruthlessness as necessary and in the long run beneficial.

### Able and Astute

These men were able, astute, iron-willed and lucky—until they broke down under the strain. It must take great nervous and spiritual discipline to maintain two separate personalities, to be always on guard, to possess only a public face, never to know when the action of a second man will throw you into the greatest danger. Eventually the persistence of such pressures showed. Maclean and Burgess became increasingly unstable and ill before their escape. The wonder is that their wildness and obvious irresponsibility didn't get them cashiered earlier. And Philby exhibited sure signs of mental disorder and anxiety when he knew the end of the trail had come.

A greater wonder is that their careers could go on for so long. The sloppiness with which the Secret Service agencies were run in Britain is unbelievable. Class bias and snobbish blindness are documented in every chapter of "The Philby Conspiracy." One of the things that protected the con-

decent connections could possibly be working for the Russians.

As a result, Philby, easily the most important figure, rose very high in British intelligence, at one point serving as head of a section dealing with Communist affairs. In Washington, he worked as liaison man between his organization and the C.I.A. and had access to material even high ranking Americans could not get at. There still seems to be some resentment in Washington over how Philby's case was handled.

How much they helped the Russians and how much they inhibited British policy is sure to be debated in the future. But don't fool yourself into believing that theirs was merely a cloak-and-dagger operation. For example, there was a time during the last war when the army and other units in Germany became disillusioned with Hitler and tried to find out what terms the Allies would accept short of unconditional surrender. But all such feelers that came through Philby's sector were stopped by him from going further, because the great Soviet nightmare was that the Allies would make peace with their adversary and let the Nazis fight on on the Eastern Front. And there were other incidents when the Russians seem to have been alerted to potential defectors in their own ranks and to saboteurs dropped into Soviet-dominated territory.

### Unusually Successful

"The Philby Conspiracy" is a full-length account of the activities of the three men, written by a team from The Sunday Times of London. For a combined effort, it is unusually successful. It harnesses a large amount of material into a coherent narrative. The authors are sparing in their own judgment, but supply enough facts to let the reader make up his own. It has more drive and more genuine suspense than a dozen concocted thrillers and will undoubtedly be the source of a dozen more.

"My Silent War" is Philby's own selective story of his involvement in British espionage: how he joined it, how he rose in service, his near escapes and his fall. He is often fierce in evaluating others, pitiless in writing off those he injured, subtle in what he wants to tell and what he wants the reader to infer. It is an interesting activity to compare the man who emerges from his own book with the one who is the subject of the other.

One thing he doesn't do is fully to declare his motives. The other book does better. It points out that after turning Communist, like countless others in the thirties, Philby went to Austria in time to see the Social Democrats destroyed by the Heimwehr. He was in Spain, reporting from Franco's side, when the Spanish Republic was abandoned by the Western democracies. Unlike others of his age, Philby saw what could happen to the Left in practice, not only in theory. It is almost as if he reasoned that he could do more by clandestinely helping Communist power than by identifying openly with a group that would fall victim to the next maneuver of the Fascist legions.